

Clinton, MD - Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD) and Congressman Ben Cardin (D-MD) hosted a town hall meeting at the Clinton Nursing and Rehabilitation Center today to discuss the upcoming Medicare prescription drug benefit.

Enrollment for the new Medicare prescription drug plans begin November 15 and the benefit will go into effect early next year. Hoyer has been an outspoken critic of the new Republican law as being unnecessarily complicated and failing to adequately take care of seniors' biggest problem, the high price of medicines. The law actually prohibits the federal government from negotiating the best price on behalf of seniors.

"Democrats wanted a different law," Hoyer said. "We wanted to simply add a prescription drug benefit to the existing Medicare program. And we wanted it run exactly like the Medicare Part B seniors already knew: where they pay 20 percent and Medicare pays 80 percent. Unfortunately, the Republicans wanted this new benefit to be run by big insurance and drug companies."

Despite opposing the bill, Hoyer believes that all seniors must protect themselves by learning about the new law's provisions, which he calls "overly and unnecessarily complex." Cardin, a recognized expert on Medicare, noted that Maryland seniors are facing an overwhelming array of choices: 19 different companies offering 47 different plans with monthly premiums that vary from \$6.44 to \$68.91, as well as a Medicare managed care option called Medicare Advantage.

Hoyer called on seniors to be patient in deciding what plan is best for them. "Some seniors have reported that companies are using high pressure tactics to make them believe they need to sign up immediately," Hoyer said. "The truth is that seniors have until May 15 to enroll, so although it's important to get started in their research, they should take their time and be very careful."

Hoyer advised seniors to call 1-800-MEDICARE or log onto www.medicare.gov for detailed information about the new benefit.

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